

THOSE WHO WATCH THE BACKYARD CAN'T SIT ON THE FENCE

By **ALEX MARVEZ INSIDE THE RING**
SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL

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It's the kind of movie that will make parents look out their windows.

The Backyard is a new documentary chronicling the backyard wrestling craze that began in the mid-1990s when the industry enjoyed a surge in popularity.

As expected, the images of teenagers and young adults trying to emulate their hard-core heroes through various forms of mutilation, including the use of fire, light bulbs, tacks and mousetraps, range from alarming to sickening. But to his credit, The Backyard director and producer Paul Hough paints a balanced picture of the genre.

"Whenever you see backyard wrestling in local news, the coverage is always slanted," said Hough, whose documentary will be shown at upcoming film festivals in Orlando, Atlanta and Philadelphia. "They always say, 'This is really bad,' and [**World Wrestling Entertainment**] says, 'Don't do it.'"

"My intention was to find people who support backyard wrestling. Plus, I like doing controversial stuff."

One of the surprising elements of The Backyard is how many parents allow their children to participate in an activity that has led to numerous injuries and at least one chronicled death in Lebanon, Tenn.

The Backyard opens with the saga of the Gates family, where a mother bonds with her two sons through their gruesome battles in "3 Stages of Hell" matches.

Hough also chronicled a backyard promotion in Kendall, N.Y., that enjoys the support of parents and the local high school. Unlike most others, that group doesn't allow extreme-style violence.

"The kids there were much more educated than most of the other people in the film," said Hough, who also found a tamer backyard promotion in England. "All the people are going off to college or are in college now. And the support given by the whole community and school system was amazing. It was shocking to see that."

Equally shocking are the antics of those who eschew legitimate wrestling schools in favor of learning through experimentation. The images of wrestlers "blading," i.e. intentionally slicing their foreheads with razor

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ore signing with WWE, said he supports

backyard wrestling but not those promotions that feature excessive violence.

"To me, it has nothing to do with wrestling," said Van Dam, who ironically made a name for himself in the promotion (Extreme Championship Wrestling) that popularized hard-core wrestling violence in America.

Hough succeeds in capturing the human element of the backyard performers. The two most interesting characters are Andrew "The Lizard" Cook and Matt "The Scar" Haugen, who earned his nickname because of a series of childhood operations. Haugen found a social circle through backyard wrestling in Phoenix, while Cook actually landed a WWE Tough Enough 2 tryout.

Hough, 29, became interested in the project when given a backyard tape while working on a Women of Wrestling pay-per-view show in January 2001. In researching the subject, Hough watched tapes from hundreds of backyard promotions and estimates there are at least 2,000 across America.

Hough said the average backyard performer in his documentary was 17, with the youngest being 11.

"I think parents do know what they're kids are doing, but they don't often know to what extent they're doing it," Hough said. "But as a contradiction, with everyone I came across in The Backyard, the parents did know what their kids were doing.

"I'm still not sure what I think of backyard wrestling because all of the people involved in the film became my friends. But I definitely enjoy watching it. There's no doubt about that."

For more information on The Backyard, e-mail Backyardfilms@aol.com.

More WWE injuries

Even referees aren't exempt from WWE's extensive injury list, as Tim White is expected to miss the next six weeks after dislocating his shoulder on the Judgment Day pay-per-view show. Ex-WWE women's champion Jazz also is out until year's end after undergoing knee surgery.

On the positive side, **Chris Benoit** should be back in the ring soon after being sidelined for almost a year following neck surgery. Benoit is slated to feud with **Steve Austin** after turning heel in his return at this week's Monday Night Raw telecast. ...

While ratings for Raw and Smackdown are on the decline, WWE has unveiled a new show that deserves watching. WWE Confidential (11 p.m. Saturdays, TNN) garnered high praise after last week's debut for giving an interesting behind-the-scenes look at the promotion's talent through a magazine-style format.

FWW news and notes

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Weekly 30-minute television show that will air on Dade County. Shows will begin airing Sundays

starting this week, with the time and channel set by individual cable systems.

The Sandman will appear at FOW's next TV taping at 7 p.m. June 8 inside the World Gym of Plantation, 7067A West Broward Blvd. Admission is free.

FOW has a show at 1 p.m. June 16 at the **Hollywood** Greyhound Track, 831 N. Federal Hwy., in Hallandale Beach. Admission is free.

FOW's next show at the Davie Bergeron Rodeo arena (6591 SW 45th St.) is slated for 7:30 p.m. June 29 and will be headlined by a 30-man table elimination match.

Call 954-748-5555 or visit www.futureofwrestling.com.

Upcoming shows

The upstart Hardkore Championship Wrestling Inc. is holding an eight-man tournament to crown its champion at 7:30 p.m. July 13 at the Hollywood Central Performing Arts Center, 1770 Monroe St. The roster features some of the industry's more well-known independent performers, including Shark Boy, Matt Stryker and Reckless Youth. Tickets are \$12. Call 954-460-2645 or visit www.hcwextreme.cjb.net.

Q & A

Q. Whatever happened to Sean O'Hare? -- Kevin Porter, Windsor, Ontario, Canada

A. O'Hare is cutting his teeth in Ohio Valley Wrestling, which is a WWE developmental territory based in Louisville, Ky. Once considered a rising star in World Championship Wrestling, WWE officials feel O'Hare needs more seasoning before being promoted from OVW.

More of the Paul Hough interview can be found at www.wrestlingobserver.com. Questions can be sent to Alex Marvez, Sun-Sentinel, 200 E. Las Olas Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301, or e-mailed to amarvez@sun-sentinel.com. Please include your full name and city of residence. Because of volume, no phone calls will be accepted and letters will not receive a written reply.

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